

GARY LOCKE
Governor



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**Gov. Locke, Agriculture Director Applaud Effort to Open Japanese Fresh
Potato Market to Washington Growers**

Locke's 2002 Asia Trade Mission Credited for Helping Highlight Issue

OLYMPIA – Aug. 11, 2003 – Gov. Gary Locke and Valoria Loveland, director of the state Department of Agriculture, today announced that the state's effort to introduce fresh Washington potatoes to Japanese potato chip manufacturers is now receiving additional support – from the Japanese industry itself.

The news is a result of Locke and Loveland's trade mission to Japan last year as well as years of work by the Washington State Potato Commission (WSPC) and the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).

According to the Bureau of National Affairs in Washington, D.C., officials from Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) have indicated that the Japanese potato chip industry is urging the government to lift the ban on imports of fresh "chipping" potatoes from the U.S.

"This is very encouraging news for potato growers in our state," Locke said. "It's further proof that our trade missions create opportunities and jobs for Washington farmers and businesses. Our potatoes are very popular in other parts of Asia, and we are eager to get them into the Japanese market. I'm pleased that our aggressive efforts are being noticed."

Locke is also planning another trade mission to Asia later this year. He is scheduled to lead a trade delegation to China in October to spotlight Washington's agriculture and high-tech industries.

Pat Boss, the Potato Commission's executive director, said the combination of the federal grant acquired by WSDA for technical seminars about Pacific Northwest chipping potatoes and the governor's July 2002 trade mission to Japan helped raise awareness with Japanese snack food manufacturers about Washington state chipping potatoes.

"I think Gov. Locke and Director Loveland should be given a lot of credit for this recent development," Boss said. "The message about Washington and Pacific Northwest chipping potatoes has obviously resonated as the Japanese chip manufacturers are asking their own government to lift the ban on imports."

Although approximately 770,000 tons of frozen potatoes are imported to Japan annually, MAFF has opposed lifting the ban on fresh potatoes. They contend that diseases from the U.S. and Europe could harm local farmers. However, if measures can be taken to prevent contamination, U.S. officials say MAFF may reconsider.

Japan's potato chip industry uses about 300,000 tons of potatoes annually. The manufacturers requested that MAFF lift the import ban for Kanagawa and Hyogo prefectures from March to June when domestic potatoes are not available, according to U.S. officials. Those two prefectures are home to most of Japan's potato chip makers.

"I believe the opportunity to talk directly to senior MAFF officials and potato chip manufacturers clarified our willingness to provide potatoes when they can not be obtained from Japanese farmers," Loveland said.

As early as the fall of 2000, the WSPC introduced Japanese potato chip manufacturers to Washington potato growers and their products while touring farms in Eastern Washington and the Skagit Valley.

In December 2000 and April 2002, representatives from the WSPC and Pacific Northwest departments of agriculture met with Japanese officials and snack food companies to discuss the quarantine. They also discussed cooperative efforts to open the market during times of the year when domestic Japanese potatoes are not available.

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